The Indian Drum

By William MacHarg and Edwin Balmer

Illustrations by IRWIN MYERS

CHAPTER XX—Continued.

—16—

"What is it you want to know?" Sherrill asked.

"What were the relations between Benjamin Corvet and Captain Stafford?"

Sherrill thought a moment.

"Corvet," he replied, "was a very able man; he had insight and mental grasp—and he had the fault which sometimes goes with those, a hesitancy of action. Stafford was an able man, too, considerably younger than Corvet. Twenty years ago, when the conflict of competing interests was at its height, Corvet was the head of one line, Stafford was head of another, and the two lines had very much the same connections and competed for the same cargoes."

"I begin to see!" Father Perron exclaimed. "Please go on."

"In the early nineties both lines still were young; Stafford had, I believe, two ships; Corvet had three."

"So few? Yes; it grows plainer!"

"In 1894, Stafford managed a stroke which, if fate had not intervened, must have assured the ultimate extinction of Corvet's line or its absorption into Stafford's. Stafford gained as his partner Franklin Ramsdell, a wealthy man whom he had convinced that the lake traffic offered chances of great profit; and this connection supplied him with the capital whose lack had been hampering him, as it was still hampering Corvet. The new firm—Stafford and Ramsdell—projected the construction, with Ramsdell's money, of a number of great steel freighters. The first of these—the Miwaka, a test ship whose experience was to guide them in the construction of the rest—was launched in the fall of 1895, and was lost on its maiden trip with both Stafford and Ramsdell aboard. The Stafford and Ramsdell interests could not survive the death of both owners and disappeared from the lakes. Is this what you wanted to know?"

The priest nodded. Alan leaned tensely forward, watching; what he had heard seemed to have increased and deepened the priest's feeling over what he had to tell and to have aided his comprehension of it.

"His name was Caleb Stafford," Father Perron began. "(This is what Benjamin Corvet told to me when he was dying under the wreckage on the ferry.) 'He was as fair and able a man as the lakes ever knew. I had my will of most men in the lake trade in those days; but I could not have my will of him. With all the lakes to trade in, he had to pick out for his that traffic which I already had chosen for my own. But I fought him fair, Father—I fought him fair, and I would have continued to do that to the end.

"'I was at Manistee, Father, in the end of the season—December fifth of 1895. The ice had begun to form very early that year and was already bad; there was cold and a high gale. I had laid up one of my ships at Manistee, and I was crossing that night upon a tug to Manitowoc, where another was to be laid up. I had still a third one loading up on the northern peninsula at Manistique for a last trip which, if it could be made, would mean a good profit from a season which so far, because of Stafford's competition, had been only fair. After leaving Manistee, it grew still more cold, and I was afraid the ice would close in on her and keep her where she was, so I determined to go north that night and see that she got out. None knew, Father, except those aboard the tug, that I had made that change.

"'At midnight, Father, to westward of the Foxes, we heard the four blasts of a steamer in distress—the four long blasts which have sounded in my soul ever since! We turned toward where we saw the steamer's lights; we went nearer and, Father, it was his great ship—the Miwaka! We had heard two days before that she had passed the Soo; we had not known more than that of where she was. She had broken her new shaft, Father, and was intact except for that, but helpless in the rising sea . . .'"

The priest broke off. "The Miwaka! I did not understand all that that had meant to him until just now—the new ship of the rival line, whose building meant for him failure and defeat!

"There is no higher duty than the rescue of those in peril at sea. He—Benjamin Corvet, who told me this—swore to me that, at the beginning none upon the tug had any thought except to give aid. A small line was drifted down to the tug and to this a hawser was attached which they hauled aboard. There happened then the first of those events which led those upon the tug into doing a great wrong. He—Benjamin Corvet—had taken charge of the wheel of the tug; three men were handling the hawser in ice and washing water at the stern. The whistle accidentally blew, which those on the Miwaka understood to mean that the hawser had been secured, as they drew in the slack; the hawser, tightened unexpectedly by the pitching of the sea, caught and crushed the captain and deckhand of the tug and threw them into the sea.

"Because they were short-handed now upon the tug, and also because consultation was necessary over what was to be done, the young owner of the Miwaka, Captain Stafford, came down the hawser onto the tug after the line had been put straight. He came to the wheelhouse, where Benjamin Corvet was, and they consulted. Then Benjamin Corvet learned that the other owner was aboard the new ship as well—Ramsdell—the man whose money you have just told me had built this and was soon to build other ships. I did not understand before why learning that affected him so much.

"'Stafford wanted us' (this is what Benjamin Corvet said) 'to tow him up the lake; I would not do that, but I agreed to tow him to Manistique. The night was dark, Father—no snow, but frightful wind which had been increasing until it now sent the waves washing clear across the tug. We had gone north an hour when, low upon the water to my right, I saw a light, and there came to me the whistling of a buoy which told me that we were passing nearer than I would have wished, even in daytime, to windward of Boulder reef. There are, Father, no people on that reef; its sides of ragged rock go straight down forty fathoms into the lake.

"'I looked at the man with me in the wheelhouse—at Stafford—and hated him! I put my head out at the wheelhouse door and looked back at the lights, at the new, great steamer following safe and straight at the end of its towline. I thought of my two men upon the tug who had been crushed by clumsiness of those on board that ship; and how my own ships had had a name for never losing a man and that name would be lost now because of the carelessness of Stafford's men! And the sound of the shoal brought the evil thought to me. Suppose I had not happened across his ship; would it have gone upon some reef like this and been lost? I thought that if now the hawser should break, I would be rid of that ship and perhaps of the owner who was on board as well. We could not pick up the tow line again in so close to the reef. The steamer would drift down upon the rocks—'"

Father Perron hesitated an instant. "I bear witness," he said solemnly, "that Benjamin Corvet assured me—his priest—that it was only a thought; the evil act which it suggested was something which he would not do or even think of doing. But he spoke something of what was in his mind to Stafford, for he said:

"'I must look like a fool to you to keep on towing your ship!'

"They stared, he told me, into one another's eyes, and Stafford grew uneasy.

"'We'd have been all right,' he answered, 'until we had got help, if you'd left us where we were!' He, too, listened to the sound of the buoy and of the water dashing on the shoal. 'You are taking us too close,' he said—'too close!' He went aft then to look at the tow line."

Father Perron's voice ceased; what he had to tell now made his face whiten as he arranged it in his memory. Alan leaned forward a little and then, with an effort, sat straight. Constance turned and gazed at him; but he dared not look at her. He felt her hand warm upon his; it rested there a moment and moved away.

"There was a third man in the wheelhouse when these things were spoken," Father Perron said, "the mate of the ship which had been laid up at Manistique."

"Henry Spearman," Sherrill supplied.

"That is the name. Benjamin Corvet told me of that man that he was young, determined, brutal and set upon getting position and wealth for himself by any means. He watched Corvet and Stafford while they were speaking, and he, too, listened to the shoal until Stafford had come back; then he went aft.

"'I looked at him, Father,' Benjamin Corvet said to me, 'and I let him go—not knowing. He came back and looked at me once more, and went again to the stern; Stafford had been watching him as well as I, and sprang away from me now and scrambled after him. The tug leaped suddenly; there was no longer any tow holding it back, for the hawser had parted; and I knew, Father, the reason was that Spearman had cut it!

"'I rang for the engine to be slowed, and I left the wheel and went aft; some struggle was going on at the stern of the tug; a flash came from there and the cracking of a shot. Suddenly all was light about me as, aware of the breaking of the hawser and alarmed by the shot, the searchlight of the Miwaka turned upon the tug. The cut end of the hawser was still upon the tug, and Spearman had been trying to clear this when Stafford attacked him; they fought, and Stafford struck Spearman down. He turned and cried out against me—accusing me of having ordered Spearman to cut the line. He held up the cut end toward Ramsdell on the Miwaka and cried out to him and showed by pointing that it had been cut. Blood was running from the hand with which he pointed, for he had been shot by Spearman; and now again and a second and a third time, from where he lay upon the deck, Spearman fired. The second of those shots killed the engineer, who had rushed out where I was on the deck; the third shot went through Stafford's head. The Miwaka was drifting down upon the reef; her whistle sounded again and again the four long blasts. The fireman, who had followed the engineer up from below, fawned on me! I was safe for all him, he said; I could trust Luke—Luke would not tell! He too thought I had ordered the doing of that thing!

"'From the Miwaka, Ramsdell yelled curses at me, threatening me for what he thought that I had done! I looked at Spearman as he got up from the deck, and I read the thought that had been in him; he had believed that he could cut the hawser in the dark, none seeing, and that our word that it had been broken would have as much strength as any accusation Stafford could make. He had known that to share a secret such as that with me would "make" him on the lakes; for the loss of the Miwaka would cripple Stafford and Ramsdell and strengthen me; and he could make me share with him whatever I made. But Stafford had surprised him at the hawser and had seen.

"'I moved to denounce him, Father, as I realized this; I moved—but stopped. He had made himself safe against accusation by me! None—none ever would believe that he had done this except by my order, if he should claim that; and he made plain that he was going to claim that. He called me a fool and defied me. Luke—even my own man, the only one left on the tug with us—believed it! And there was murder in it now, with Stafford dying there upon the deck and with the certainty that all those on the Miwaka could not be saved. I felt the noose as if it had been already tied about my neck! And I had done no wrong, Father! I had only thought wrong!

"'So long as one lived among those on the Miwaka who had seen what was done, I knew I would be hanged; yet I would have saved them if I could. But, in my comprehension of what this meant, I only stared at Stafford where he lay and then at Spearman, and I let him get control of the tug. The tug, whose wheel I had lashed, heading her into the waves, had been moving slowly. Spearman pushed me aside and went to the wheelhouse; he sent Luke to the engines, and from that moment Luke was his. He turned the tug about to where we still saw the lights of the Miwaka. The steamer had struck upon the reef; she hung there for a time; and Spearman—he had the wheel and Luke, at his orders, was at the engine—held the tug off and we beat slowly to and fro until the Miwaka slipped off and sank.

"Constance!" He Caught Her. She Let Him Hold Her.

Some had gone down with her, no doubt; but two boats had got off, carrying lights. They saw the tug approaching and cried out and stretched their hands to us; but Spearman stopped the tug. They rowed toward us then, but when they got near, Spearman moved the tug away from them, and then again stopped. They cried out again and rowed toward us; again he moved the tug away, and then they understood and stopped rowing and cried curses at us. One boat soon drifted far away; we knew of its capsizing by the extinguishing of its light. The other capsized near to where we were. Those in it who had no lifebelts and could not swim, sank first. Some could swim and, for a while they fought the waves.'"

Alan, as he listened, ceased consciously to separate the priest's voice from the sensations running through him. His father was Stafford, dying at Corvet's feet while Corvet watched the death of the crew of the Miwaka; Alan himself, a child, was floating with a lifebelt among those struggling in the water whom Spearman and Corvet were watching die. Memory; was it that which now had come to him? No; rather it was a realization of all the truths which the priest's words were bringing together and arranging rightly for him.

Alan's father died in the morning. All day they stayed out in the storm, avoiding vessels. They dared not throw Stafford's body overboard or that of the engineer, because, if found, the bullet holes would have aroused inquiry. When night came again, they had taken the two ashore at some wild spot and buried them; to make identification harder, they had taken the things that they had with them and buried them somewhere else. The child—Alan—Corvet had smuggled ashore and sent away; he had told Spearman later that the child had died.

"Peace—rest!" Father Perron said in a deep voice. "Peace to the dead!"

But for the living there had been no peace. Spearman had forced Corvet to make him his partner; Corvet had tried to take up his life again, but had not been able. His wife, aware that something was wrong with him, had learned enough so that she had left him. Luke had come and come again for backmail, and Corvet had paid him. Corvet grew rich; those connected with him prospered; but with Corvet lived always the ghosts of those he had watched die with the Miwaka—of those who would have prospered with Stafford except for what had been done. Corvet had secretly sought and followed the fate of the kin of those people who had been murdered to benefit him; he found some of their families destroyed; he found almost all poor and struggling. And though Corvet paid Luke to keep the crime from disclosure, yet Corvet swore to himself to confess it all and make such restitution as he could. But each time that the day he had appointed with himself arrived, he put it off and off and paid Luke again and again. Spearman knew of his intention and sometimes kept him from it. But Corvet had made one close friend; and when that friend's daughter, for whom Corvet cared now most of all in the world, had been about to marry Spearman, Corvet defied the cost to himself, and he gained strength to oppose Spearman. So he had written to Stafford's son to come; he had prepared for confession and restitution; but, after he had done this and while he waited, something had seemed to break in his brain; too long preyed upon by terrible memories, and the ghosts of those who had gone, and by the echo of their voices crying to him from the water, Corvet had wandered away; he had come back, under the name of one of those whom he had wronged, to the lake life from which he had sprung. Only now and then, for a few hours, he had intervals when he remembered all; in one of these he had dug up the watch and the ring and other things which he had taken from Captain Stafford's pockets and written to himself directions of what to do with them, when his mind again failed.

And for Spearman, strong against all that assailed Corvet, there had been always the terror of the Indian Drum—the Drum which had beat short for the Miwaka, the Drum which had known that one was saved! That story came from some hint which Luke had spread, Corvet thought; but Spearman, born near by the Drum, believed that the Drum had known and that the Drum had tried to tell; all through the years Spearman had dreaded the Drum which had tried to betray him.

So it was by the Drum that, in the end, Spearman was broken.

The priest's voice had stopped, as Alan slowly realized; he heard Sherrill's voice speaking to him.

"It was a trust that he left you, Alan; I thought it must be that—a trust for those who suffered by the loss of your father's ship. I don't know yet how it can be fulfilled; and we must think of that."

"That's how I understand it," Alan said.

Through the tumult in his soul he became aware of physical feelings again, and of Sherrill's hand put upon his shoulder in a cordial, friendly grasp. Then another hand, small and firm, touched his, and he felt its warm tightening grasp upon his fingers; he looked up, and his eyes filled and hers, he saw, were brimming too.

They walked together, later in the day, up the hill to the small, white house which had been Caleb Stafford's. The woman who had come to the door was willing to show them through the house; it had only five rooms. One of those upon the second floor was so much larger and pleasanter than the rest that they became quite sure that it was the one in which Alan had been born, and where his young mother soon afterward had died.

The woman, who had showed them about, had gone to another room and left them alone.

"There seems to have been no picture of her and nothing of hers left here that any one can tell me about; but," Alan choked, "it's good to be able to think of her as I can now.

"I mean—no one can say anything against her now!"

Alan drew nearer her, trembling.

"I can never thank you—I can never tell you what you did for me, believing in—her and in me, no matter how things looked. And then, coming up here as you did—for me!"

"Yes, it was for you, Alan!"

"Constance!" He caught her. She let him hold her.

The woman was returning to them now and, perhaps, it was as well; for not yet, he knew, could he ask her all that he wished; what had happened was too recent yet for that. But to him, Spearman—half mad and fleeing from the haunts of men—was beginning to be like one who had never been; and he knew she shared this feeling. The light in her deep eyes was telling him already what her answer to him would be; and life stretched forth before him full of love and happiness and hope.

[THE END.]

Nature's Changes.

The eastern slope of the Rockies was more humid in the Cretaceous and Tertiary than now, as one may judge by the petrified forests scattered from the Yellowstone park to Arizona, and the remains of holly, oaks, elms, chestnuts, sequoias, and other trees in the florissant shales of Colorado. In the Tertiary age the East and West were again united by land. But this was a period of successive uplifts and depressions. Areas became submerged and their forests destroyed. Other areas were subjected to severe changes locally. Erosion and other disturbances must have greatly modified the character, proportion and distribution of the species. Then came the ice age, and forces re-established themselves.

The bill of the albatross is a pale pink color, shading to yellow at the tip.

America's Gift to France

Paul W. Bartlett's $50,000 heroic bronze statue of Lafayette which the Knights of Columbus presented to the city of Metz, France.

Bells That Rang for Lafayette

Lafayette visited America for the last time in 1824. From the hour in which his advent was heralded by a rainbow enveloping and tinging Fort Lafayette, just across the Narrows, until he set sail for his native land, he was feted and lionized. All the church bells of New York shouted; New Havenites forgot their puritanical primness and joined lustily. Newport, R. I. forgot that its most valued bell had been given Trinity church by an English queen and set it ringing louder, even, than when it was presented by Queen Anne on her ascension to her father's throne. Providence proved that the bell she cast herself in 1787 for her Baptist church was capable of welcoming reverberations; and the largest in the town, weighing nearly 3,000 pounds, outdid itself because it was cast by Paul Revere of Middlesex county fame.

Welcoming Peals at Boston.

In Boston Lafayette heard Revere's first-cast bell, hanging in the New Brick church. Those of Christ church, Old Brick church, as well of those of the Old South assured him of their welcome; while King's chapel outdid them all. The Harvard college bells, already old, were not remiss.

The ovations continued throughout the South. Entering Charleston, preceded by a troop mounted on white horses, Lafayette rode with his son, George Washington Lafayette, and the same little boy, now Major Huger, who played with his French sword and attempted to rescue him at Olmutz. Perhaps Lafayette never had a happier moment than, thus riding, he heard St. Michaels' bells once more. His Charleston friends may have told him of the sad days when Major Traille of the Royal artillery claimed those same bells as his perquisites when the British had entered the city; and of the anxieties experienced until, through the good offices of London friends, they were returned to their tower.

Paid Honors in the West.

At St. Louis he heard of the small bells carried by Father Marquette in the Northwest; by De Smet in the further Northwest (oh, how great the country grew as Lafayette listened!) even, possibly, of the padre who was building a chain of missions on the western coast and ringing a bell whenever he founded a mission. Pierre Chouteau was a busy man, but he knew many things and the gallant visitor must know how wonderful the western world was—how much greater than he knew when he fought for its liberty.

Another boat trip—up the Ohio. Needs must he stop at Marietta, Ohio, a town founded by Revolutionary officers, Putnam and others, who had been given a grant of land for their services to the government. Was not the town named for Marie Antoinette? And had she not, from the enthusiasm roused by Benjamin Franklin's vivid descriptions of far-away America and flattered by the choice of a name for the new town, ordered a bell for it? That it was lost in shipwreck did not detract from her thought; nor Lafayette's interest as he heard of the incident for the first time. He may have smiled a bit, remembering that Franklin once refused to give a bell to a town named for himself, saying: "I'll give books, sense is more than round."

Refused Crown of Belgium.

Lafayette's visit to America ended in rainbow tints, even as it had begun. Next, we may see him talking with Louis Phillippe I:

"You know that I am a republican, and that I regard the Constitution of the United States as the most perfect that ever existed." Later, all Paris swung her bells in recognition of Lafayette's prime part in the revolution of 1830—a revolution which resulted in a considerable extension of the liberties of mankind. Following this, he was offered the crown of Belgium. But this he refused.

It is pleasant to reflect on the peaceful years that followed for Lafayette at La Grange, his country seat. He could occasionally ride horseback, and the very white charger that bore him in Paris carried him over country lanes and wide, cultivated fields. The tocsins of war or of welcome were replaced by one far less notable but none the less important—his dinner bell, which called him and his many famous guests to his generous table.

Final Glorious Vision.

Finally, in 1834, came a gray dawn. Lafayette knew his great achievement was in America; but he also knew he had aided in the betterment of the masses of his native land. As, this hushed morn, he grew drowsy, after a night of pain, none of the watchers could see or hear what he undoubtedly saw and heard:

He saw himself mounted on a white charger, gallantly facing the foe. He saw Washington coming for him on another noble steed. He saw his wife's flowing apparel and lovely face brightening into a smile of ecstatic welcome, as it had when he returned from the wars in which he had taken noble part.

Replica of Our Statue of Liberty on the Pont de Grenelle, Paris.

The friends wheeled their horses and Lafayette's joined their stride up a shining road. Soon glittering ramparts came into view—the last leap was at hand. As the horses gathered themselves for the spring, as each of his companions turned to watch their loved one, bells began to peal—Jacquiline of Paris, St. Michaels of Charleston, Bow Bells, Erfurt, Olmutz, Boston, joined in the magic welcome. Finally they died away, and the bells of Paris gave their salutatarium.

One bell alone had not rung. It waited—waited. The horses had cleared the parapet. Then, as though all heaven was filled with its voice, the Independence Bell of America greeted Lafayette:

"You have proclaimed liberty throughout the land and to all the inhabitants thereof."